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Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL MDARAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 0906

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IN, MV
SUBJECT: MRS. GANDHI VISITS THE MALDIVE ISLANDS

REF: NEW DELHI 3893 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: INDIAN OFFICIALS WHO ACCOMPANIED MRS. GANDHI TO THE MALDIVE ISLANDS SAY THAT THE DISPOSITION OF THE GAN AIRBASE AFTER THE BRITISH DEPART IS STILL UNRESOLVED. BUT THEY SEEM SOMEWHAT REASSURED THAT A NO OTHER COUNTRY WILL GET IT. DURING THE VISIT, INDIA OFFERED SOME MODEST ASSISTANCE FOR THE MALDIVES TO EXPAND THEIR TRADE AND EXTERNAL CONTACTS WITH COUNTRIES BEYOND SRI LANKA. MRS. GANDHI GOT MALDIVIAN SUPPORT FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE PROPOSAL AND FOR INDIAN NUCLEAR POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. INDIAN OFFICIALS IN DELHI APPEAR PLEASED WITH MRS.
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GANDHI'S VISIT TO THE MALDIVE ISLANDS, JANUARY 12-14.

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THE MALDIVIANS WENT TO GREAT PAINS TO RECEIVE HER PROPERLY, WITH THE PRIME MINISTER EVEN MOVING OUT OF HIS HOUSE. INDIAN OFFICIALS CONTRAST THIS RECEPTION TO THE SITUATION IN THE 1960'S WHEN, THEY SAY, THE MALDIVES WERE PRO-PAKISTAN AND RATHER ALOOF FROM INDIA.

2. INDIAN OFFICIALS SAY THAT THE INDIAN OBJECTIVE IS STABILITY IN THE MALDIVES WITHOUT ANY OUTSIDE PRESENCE. IN PARTICULAR, THE GOI WISHES TO PREVENT ANY COUNTRY FROM MOVING INTO THE AIRFIELD ON GAN WHEN THE BRITISH MOV OUT. BEFORE THE VISIT, INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY JOINT SECRETARY (SOUTH), ALFRED GOLSALVES, TOLD US THAT ACCORDING TO BRITISH SOURCES IN LONDON, WHILE THE BRITISH WOULD WITHDRAW, THEY MIGHT NOT TERMINATE THEIR AGREEMENT GIVING THEM THE RIGHT TO USE GAN. THEY WOULD RESERVE THEIR RIGHT TO RETURN TO GAN UNTIL THE AGREEMENT EXPIRES IN 1986. THE MALDIVES WOULD THEN BE PRECLUDED FROM ALLOWING OTHER COUNTRIES TO USE GAN OR ESTABLISH OTHER FACILITIES IN THE MALDIVES. THE BRITISH WISHED TO RETAIN THEIR SKYNET SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS FACILITY ON THE ATOL ADJOINING GAN BUT WOULD USE IT ONLY FOR CIVIL USES. A SMALL BRILISH SUPPORT ELEMENT WOULD REMAIN ON FOR THE PURPOSE. THE UK WOULD NEGOTIATE AID TERMS TO THE MALDIVES IN "EXCHANGE" FOR THE LOSS OF INCOME AS A RESULT OF THE CLOSURE OF GAN, ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD NOT FORMALLY ADMIT TO THE COMPENSATORY NATURE OF THE AID. (THE BRITISH HERE HAVE ASKED LONDON BUT AS YET HAVE NO CONFORMATION OF HMG VIEWS ON ALL OF LHIS.)

3. AFTER THE VISIT, GOLSALVES REPORTED THAT THE MALDIVIANS HAD SAID THAT THEY WERE AWAILING TALKS WITH THE BRITISH BEFORE DECIDING WHAT TO DO ABOUT GAN. HE IMPLIED THAT THEY HAD SAID THAT THERE WAS SOME QUESTION WHETHER THE PROVISION OF THE AGREEMENT ON GAN PRECLUDING ANY OTHER MILITARY PRESENCE WOULD REMAIN VALID IF THE BRITISH WITHDREW BUL SOUGHT TO RETAIN POSSESSION OF GAN. SEPARATELY, DILIP MUKERJEE OF THE TIMES OF INDIA TELLS US THAT THE MALDIVIAN PRIME MINISTER TOLD HIM THAT THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES FOR ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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TERMINATION AT ANY TIME BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT AND THE MALDIVES WILL ASK FOR SUCH TERMINATION WHEN THE BRITISH DEPART. THE BRITISH WILL THEN HAVE NO RESIDUAL RIGHTS AND THE MALDIVES WANT TO DEVELOP GAN FOR TOURISM. NO OTHER COUNTRY WILL GET THE GAN FACILITY, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID.

4. THE INDIANS HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT SOMEBODAY WILL

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MAKE AN OFFER FOR GAN SO LARGE THAT THE MALDIVES WILL
BE UNABLE TO TURN IT DOWN. THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE
INTERESTED IN THEORY, BUT INDIAN OFFICIALS BELIEVE THAT
THEY WOULD HAVE SECOND THOUGHLS IN THE LAST ANALYSIS.
INDIA, IN ANY CASE, WON'T OFFER A SUBVENTION TO TAKE
UP THE SLACK LEFT BY THE BRITISH DEPARTURE AND WHILE
GOLSALVES ACKNOWLEDGED IL MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR INDIA
TO HAVE SOME COMMUNICATIONS FACILITY ON IN THE
MALDIVES HE EXPRESSED DOUBT THE GOI WOULD VENTURE DOWN
THAT COURSE. DURING MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT INDIA
ANNOUNCED ONLY MODEST ASSISTANCE: RS.4 MILLION
($500,000) FOR A FISH CANNERY AND HELP WITH CONSTRUCTION OF
19 SCHOOL BUILDINGS. IT AGREED TO STUDY THE POSSIBILITY
OF OPENING AN "AIR MALDIVES" ROUTE BETWEEN TRIVANDUM
AND MALE. INDIA ALSO OFFERED THREE ADDITIONAL
SCHOLARSHIPS A YEAR FOR MALDIVIANS, TO STUDY
MEDICINE IN INDIA.

5. BOTH DURING THE VISIT AND IN THE COMMUNIQUE THE
MALDIVIAN PRIME MINISTER EXPRESSED "APPRECIATION AND
FULL UNDERSTANDING" OF INDIAN NUCELAR POLICY.
GONSALVES SAID THAT THIS WAS AT MALDIVIAN INITIATIVE
AND WAS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE
VISIT. THE COMMUNIQUE ALSO RECORDED A JOINT DESIRE TO
MAINTAIN THE INDIAN OCEAN AS A ZONE OF PEACE AND THE
2CONCERN" OF THE TWO COUNTRIES OVER "RECENT DEVELOPMENTS"
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA. (THIS ECHOED A SPEECH BY
MRS. GANDHI IN MALE. INDIAN OFFICIALS INTERPRET IT AS
A "MORE POSITIVE" FORMULATION ON THE INDIAN
OCEAN THAN THAT INTHE MARCH 1974 COMMUNIQUE.

6. INDIAN TIES WITH THE MALDIVES HAVE INCREASED
SUBSTANTIALLY OVER THE LAST YEAR OR SO. THERE IS A
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TELETYPE LINK TO BOMBAY; THE STATE BANK OF INDIA
OPERATES THE ONLY BANK IN THE MALDIVES; 35 MALDIVIANS,
INCLUDING THE SON OF THE PRIME MINISTER, ARE STUDYING IN
INDIA; AND THERE IS AGREEMENT THAT THE MALDIVES WILL
OPEN A CONSULATE GENERAL IN BOMBAY. WHILE OBVIOUSLY
NOT UNHAPPY ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THESE TIES TO A
COUNTRY ONLY LESS THAN 300 MILES OFF THE INDIAN COAST,
RINDIAN OFFICIALS PRESENT THEM AS PART OF A GENERAL
MALDIVIAN EFFORT TO DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH COUNTRIES
BEYOND SRI LANKA. THE FISH CANNERY WILL REPLACE NOW-
DECLINING SALES TO SRI LANKA. ALSO, ONE REASON FOR
MALDIVIAN INTEREST IN AN AIR LINK TO INDIA IS CEYLONESE
PRESSURE TO HAVE TOURISTS FOR THE MALDIVES ALSO SPEND
SOME TIME IN SRILANKA, ACCORDING TO INDIAN OFFICIALS.
INDIA, HOWEVER, DOES NOT EXPECT TO SUPPLANT SRI LANKA.

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IT DOESN'T SEE THE MALDIVES OPENING AN EMBASSY IN
NEW DELHI FOR SOME TIME IF EVER. NOR DOES IT HAVE OR FORE-
SEE MUCH TRADE WITH THE MALDIVES.

7. COMMENT: WE ACCEPT THE INDIAN ARGUMAENT THAT INDIA
MOSTLY WANTS TO KEEP OTHERS OUT THE MALDIVES. IN
THAT CONTEXT, MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT APPEARS SUCCESSFUL.
WHILE THE PRESENCE OF THE INDIAN CRUISER MYSORE
OFFSHORE DURING THE VISIT MAY HAVE INDEED BEEN NECESSARY
FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT AS THE GOI SAYS,
IT ALSO UNDERLINED FOR THE MALDIVES EXACTLY WHICH
REGIONAL POWER IS STRONGEST.
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